



She gave her heart to him the day they met. Yet a cloud of mystery hung over his life. Was it a hidden past? Was it a dual personality? Thrills and excitement, suspense and surprise blend in each fascinating instalment. Miss May Christie has woven with rare skill this charming story of entangled hearts. :: :: ::

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WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY.

JIM DALTON, a handsome young artist who falls in love with **SHIRLEY MARSH**, a pretty and attractive girl. Shirley is also loved by **DAVID BURKE**, a country gentleman, nearing forty. **LUCILLE**, a rather world weary actress, about whose marriage there is a mystery.

CHAPTER I.

ON a sleepy summer's afternoon, when the shafts of golden sunlight filtered through nodding beech trees to make dancing patterns on a Surrey backwater, Miss Shirley Marsh—young, very much alive, bewitchingly pretty and attractive—leaned forward in her small canoe and with paddle poised reflectively in mid-air thus addressed her vis-a-vis:

"Love? How I dislike the word! And everything else that's sentimental! I'd never be so crazy as to fall in love!"

Her lips curled scornfully, and her rounded little chin was tilted up defiantly—but in her pretty eyes as they rested on the eligible admirer who was gazing at her so intently, lurked the provocative gleam of the eternal Eve.

"Some day you'll meet your Waterloo, Miss Shirley—meantime, touch wood!" And David Burke, prosaic, country gentleman, who had loved

this will-o'-the-wisp young woman through many a tantalizing day, smiled till the fine little creases round his eyes belied the queer pain in his heart.

How young she was! How pretty! And how out of reach!

"To be really appreciated one should never fall in love!" Miss Shirley smiled a little smile so bright and radiant that even the glancing sunlight on the Surrey backwater seemed dimmed by contrast.

"I think some people are just made for love," said simple David Burke, his eyes on Shirley and his whole soul shining through them. "I think—"

She gave a little trilling laugh—and when she laughed, the music of it seemed to her prosaic lover a bewitching melody of birds' song and running water and soft woodland sounds.

"You ought to have lived a hundred years ago, you dear, romantic goose! Just made for love! Indeed! Just made to be trodden on! You mean! No, thank you—not for me!" She sneered her plangent little face into a Minerva-like solemnity as she continued:

"Could you picture me in the domestic role of doorman?"

"But—Shirley—you don't understand—"

"Indeed I do! Too well!" A pert gleam shone in Miss Shirley's eyes. She flicked the water smartly with her paddle. "Believe me, I'm not 'made for love.' I've other things in view."

Leaning forward from the stern of the canoe, David Burke touched a ransomed fold of the dainty summer frock the young girl wore—and there was reverence, as well as adulation, in the touch.

"This pretty frock—and you—" he stammered, "delicate, dainty, distracting—in spite of all you say, you aren't made of sterner stuff? I'm glad of it!"

"Mr. Burke, are you crazy?" There was an icy note in Shirley's fresh young voice. Beneath elevated brows, her gaze went forth, rebukingly.

But to David Burke—her "nearly-middle-aged admirer," as mentally she styled him—speech evidently had come, a point-up flood that no longer would be damned.

"Crazy? Perhaps I am! Crazy for love of you—crazy with wanting you! Shirley, my dear, don't draw away." He caught her two hands and the canoe paddle in his own strong clasp—a grip that would not be denied. "Shirley!"

"Don't! You hurt me—and you frighten me!" Miss Shirley, despite her previous valiant protestations, reverted instantly to the timid, helpless type she so affected to despise.

But David Burke went on.

"My dear—my dear—I know I'm not nearly good enough for such a girl as you. But I'd do everything in the world to make you happy. Some-

"It's a glorious world," said Shirley, softly, with apparent irrelevance. She stared across the little creek into the melting greenness of the summer woods, her pretty head averted so that she might not see the pain in David's eyes. She hated so to hurt him! "It's a glorious world—but I haven't lived my day yet—and I want so much to live it!"

"Ambition? A career? Society? All dead sea fruit!" said David pleadingly. "Don't fling love away for empty things."

"I don't want to fling it away—I do appreciate it—but I'm not quite ready to receive it yet." Shirley's white brows were knitted together in perplexity. "Later on, perhaps—"

"I won't say any more, my dear—but remember, I shan't change," said David Burke in his normal, kindly tones, pulling himself together. "And now, suppose we return to the White Cottage for the tea and strawberries—"

use what happened—calamity occurred, in the shape of a big touring car driven at a reckless pace around the bend—a pace so swift that she had no time to save herself, to spring aside.

She screamed. The big car swerved to avoid her, running crazily for a second with two wheels on the bank. Then—

Crash! It overturned, hurling its solitary driver with terrific force for thirty feet along the road.

Shirley screamed again, her slender figure emerging from a cloud of dust. Only a foot away from her panted the great car on its side, like some defeated giant, groaning.

In a twinkling David Burke sprang forward and switched off the engine. Then he ran swiftly down the bank towards the prostrate figure of the driver, lying there so quietly.

"Oh, is—he killed?" gasped Shirley, white to the lips, and with such a trembling at the knees that her

limbs refused to carry her. Everything seemed whirling in confusion. But David Burke was kneeling in the roadway, passing a careful hand over that silent figure—and made no answer.

As she walked beside him in the flickering shadow of the beech-trees, her floppy river hat slung by a ribbon to her arm, and her piquant little face one glow of animation, prosaic David Burke decided, as he had done a hundred times before—that for beauty, freshness, charm of manner and complete bewitchingness no other girl could ever come within a hundred miles of Shirley Marsh!

"Listen! A motor horn!" They had reached a little winding lane, flanked by high mossy banks on either side.

"No car would ever attempt to come this way—the road's too narrow," Burke observed. "I heard no sound."

Down the centre of the little lane walked Shirley.

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doubt about it that he's got concussion—"

"Then hurry hurry!" Pink spots of excitement burned in Shirley's cheeks. "Grandmamma will give you brandy to bring back with you—and she'll phone the nearest doctor to come at once to the White Cottage—of course we'll carry this poor boy there—"

And David Burke went running down the road, turned sharply to the right and disappeared through the short cut in the woods, leaving the young girl and her patient to a silence and a solitude complete.

Suppose that he should die? Shirley bent over the calm, pale face with its bandaged forehead, lying there so helpless on her lap.

How young he was—not more than two-and-twenty! And—yes, decidedly—how good-looking!

A little trickle of blood, escaping from the bandage, was on his hair—and Shirley wiped it off with her own

transitory. Life and death had come very close to her that day—but life had won!

GOLDEN MOMENTS. ON a certain golden afternoon a fortnight later a young man and a girl were strolling through the Surrey woods. The man was tall and rather slender, with a wiry, well-knit frame, a lean and boyish face lit by a pair of fine dark eyes, and the possessors of a sensitive, mobile mouth that indicates the true artist.

The sun went glinting through the tracery of the beech trees down on their uncovered heads—on the man's dark, curly, close cropped hair, and on the girl's wavy, red-gold locks.

They stopped in a green little glade, beside a woodland pool fringed by soft ferns.

"Miss Shirley, here's your back-ground—this is an ideal spot for a picture!" Jim Dalton set his easel down. He pointed to a mossy carpet underneath a slender, arching birch tree and close to the water's edge.

"Just curl up over there—hat in your hand—so! Ruffle up your hair a little bit. My! You look beautiful! Do you know, you're a regular woodland nymph to-day!"

Miss Shirley, not unconscious of the pleasing picture that she made, smiled up at him, her blue eyes very blue, her pink cheeks with a wild rose flush upon them, and her reddish-gold locks and soft blue gown a vivid contrast to the glorious greenness of the woods.

"Must I sit very stiff while you're at work?" she queried, her small face up-tilted at a charming angle.

"Yes—but you can talk to me if you like!"

"I won't bring on your headache!" An anxious look crept into the blue depths of Miss Shirley's eyes. Her patient's welfare was of great importance to her.

"As though you could make my head ache!" Jim Dalton's smile held a reproachful tenderness that made

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Miss Shirley blush adorably. "You foolish little girl!"

"Is—in the pose correct?" Inquired the embarrassed artist, hoping he didn't see the blush.

"Quite perfect—just hold on as you are!" The young man hastily drew forth his canvases and paints.

And an enchanted silence fell between them—a happy, comprehending sort of silence that spoke more vividly than words.

For Shirley and her erstwhile patient were approaching that dear, delightful crisis known as "falling in love"—had, indeed, been steadily working up to it for the last two weeks.

With all the charming egotism of the young when youth and love romance are beckoning, Miss Shirley had quite forgotten David Burke, her "nearly-middle-aged admirer," or, to be more correct, had relegated him to a dusty corner of her mind.

How tame and dull that prosaic wooing seemed beside the ardor of the handsome, eager boy!

She gazed down into the fern-fringed pool, and saw the image of her own fresh face. How wonderful it was to be young and pretty and—beloved!

"Please look directly at me—I want to see your eyes!" The artist's words were intended to be businesslike, but to Shirley they sounded like a caress. "They're the bluest things I've ever seen. Miss Shirley—bluer than the hyacinths!"

The enchanted silence of the woods was broken, and the young girl gave her soft, throaty little laugh.

"That isn't true—O flatterer!" Jim Dalton halted momentarily in his work, brush poised in mid air, lips smiling happily.

"Upon the contrary! When I woke up by the roadside on that ever-blessed afternoon two weeks ago, with my head in your lap and your eyes looking down into mine, I thought a piece of the sky had tumbled down by mistake!"

"And I thought you were dying!" supplemented Shirley, a very tender, reminiscent light on her pretty face.

"Dying? With all the inducements in the world to live!" Jim Dalton laughed his boyish laugh. "No—not a chance of it!"

From out the undergrowth appeared a tiny, furry head, watching those curious humans with bright, yet timid eyes.

"I should think if any man were dying," went on the young artist fastidiously, "and you looked at him with the kind of smile you gave me then, he'd want to live! It was wonderful, Miss Shirley!"

He suddenly forsook his easel, and came to fling his long length at her feet.

"It's much too glorious a day for work!" said he.

The little rabbit scampered off into the undergrowth with flying feet. How unoriginal they were, these human in the little green world were to like a hundred times—especially in the spring!

THE ENCOUNTER. F'LL moon was up that night. And Shirley could not sleep.

From under her pillow she drew forth her wrist watch, glancing at its luminous figures.

Why, it was only 11 o'clock! Sweet scents of the garden drifted through her open window, as though beckoning her to come out into the clear, perfumed air.

The moon shone down beautifully upon them—and it almost seemed as though an amiable twinkling lurked somewhere on her kind old face.

Only—the happy lovers didn't notice it—was it their way?

"Shirley, I'll go up to town to-morrow and get the engagement ring! We'll do everything properly, as it should be done!"

"Yes, Jim." The young girl's eyes were shining.

He stooped and kissed her on the lips—that long, first kiss with which no other can compare.

The following afternoon Jim set off to town upon his precious mission. Miss Shirley roved the country roads in dreamy solitude.

The minutes had occurred as last—she was in love!

On her return she was conscious of a stranger sitting on a rustic bench upon the lawn—a tall, good-looking young woman, with an air of nation, very smartly dressed.

As she approached the stranger rose and rustled elegantly across the grass.

"The maid said you were out, and so I waited here for you." The smart young woman took in every detail of Shirley's fresh appearance, speaking the while in a low, beautifully modulated voice.

"She must be an actress—and she's very handsome," Shirley thought.

But about she merely said: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I understand," said the older woman, eyeing Shirley keenly, "that Mr. Jim Dalton is staying at your house."

"Yes, but he's gone up to town to-day." A memory of Jim's mission brought a quick confident smile to Shirley's lips. Then she added brightly:

"Do you know him?"

A queer look crossed the stranger's face. And when she spoke, the words were like a thunderbolt.

"I ought to know him—he's my husband," she said grimly.

(To be continued in To-morrow's Fascinating Instalment.)

And—what was that small red glow down by the little wicket gate?

It was Jim's cigar—and he was there!

She got up hurriedly, before her resolution should change, slipped on some clothes and a small white cloak, and noiselessly descended.

A world of scented blossom—silence—and full moon!

Could any setting be more exquisite?

There could be no doubt that he loved her! His eyes, the tones of his voice, his every action told her so!

In the shadow of a big elm tree, and close to an old, herbaceous border, she hesitated for a moment. She didn't want to be too bold.

How silent the countryside was lying, bathed in this clear white splendour!

"Shirley!" Jim was beside her. "Shirley—my dear—is that you?"

She laughed a little tremulously.

"It's an enchanted evening, isn't it? I couldn't sleep!"

"He caught her by the arm. 'Come down this path—over to those shadows—and smell the roses—and see the big white moon!'"

"Like two children on some truant's adventure, they stole off into a little world of perfumed shade, hearts beating rapidly."

In a nearby wood a nightingale began to sing. Her throbbing notes were full of passion and of ecstasy. All about them was the perfume of the roses, rising to the senses like a sweet narcotic.

"Shirley!" The young man flung an arm about her slim cloaked figure, drawing it nearer to himself. "Shirley, I never thought the world could hold such beauty—and such happiness—till I met you!"

The moonlight flickered for a moment on her face, giving it a weird, unearthly sort of beauty, as she whispered:

"You look just like a fairy princess—only a thousand times more beautiful!"

"You're laughing at me!" Again that tremulous note in Shirley's voice. "Hush! Listen to the nightingale!"

"Do you know just what it's saying?" Jim's tones were breathless, like a runner nearing the goal.

"Wonderful things!"

"The things I want to say to you, sweetheart, and that I haven't got the words for!"

She turned and looked at him, her prettiness shining pearl-like in the moonlight.

"I want to hear them—Jim!" He caught her close in his two arms, then, tilting up her little face, "Shirley!"

"Yes, Jim?"

"Shirley, I love you!" He drew a long, deep breath. "That isn't original—but it's true!"

"My dear!" she whispered back again, hiding her face against his shoulder. "Oh, Jim—"

"Shirley—I simply worship you! How I love what life meant until that day I nearly lost it—and met a kind of paradise since then! Tell me you do care just a little bit! Oh, Shirley!"

His voice broke pleadingly. She did not answer, hiding her face still closer up against his shoulder. How big he was—how strong—how altogether wonderful! That a nice tobacco smell about his coat, too—

"Shirley—dearest—you aren't going to break my heart? Say that you'll try to get to like me a little!"

She laughed the throaty little laugh he loved to hear.

"You foolish boy—I've loved you from the moment that I met you!"

He gave one long, hard sigh of sheer relief then, and held her tighter in his arms. His eyes were just a trifle moist.

"I swear that I'll be good to you, my dear! I don't care how I believe in my own tremendous luck! A girl like you—that any man would love—that could marry anybody—it's wonderful!"

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"MY DEAR," SHE WHISPERED BACK, HIDING HER FACE AGAINST HIS SHOULDER. "OH, JIM—"

your dear old grandmother promised to supply us with! I'm ready."

With swift, sure strokes Miss Shirley paddled the canoe along the stream until they reached the boat-house. There she moored her little craft.

As she walked beside him in the flickering shadow of the beech-trees, her floppy river hat slung by a ribbon to her arm, and her piquant little face one glow of animation, prosaic David Burke decided, as he had done a hundred times before—that for beauty, freshness, charm of manner and complete bewitchingness no other girl could ever come within a hundred miles of Shirley Marsh!

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